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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT THIEU: POLITICAL OUTLOOK.

1. WHEN I MET PRESIDENT THIEU ON FEBRUARY 18, HE LAUGHINGLY COMMENTED THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN IS IN FULL SWING NOW IN THE PRESS. THERE IS MUCH SPECULATION AND MANY PREDICTIONS AS TO WHO WILL BE THE RUNNING MATES OF THE MAIN CONTENDERS.

2. WHEN I ASKED IF HE THOUGHT THAT MINH HAD MADE UP HIS MIND TO RUN, HE GAVE BERGER AND ME A MOST AMUSING ACCOUNT OF MINH'S INDECISIVE CHARACTER. HE WAS MINH'S DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF AT ONE TIME, AND HE DESCRIBED MINH'S WAY OF WORKING. WHEN AN OPERATION WAS CONTEMPLATED MINH WOULD CALL A MEETING, THERE WOULD BE BRIEFINGS, AND THEN MINH WOULD PICK OUT ALL THE WEAKNESSES ON HIS SIDE AND ALL THE STRONG PONTS OF THE ENEMIES. HE WOULD THEN CONCLUDE THAT "THE SITUATION IS NOT IDEAL," "FURTHER STUDY OR
FURTHER ACTION IS NEEDED." "WE WILL HAVE TO MEET AGAIN TO CONSIDER WHAT TO DO."

3. CONTINUING, THIEU SAID, WHEN THEY WERE PLOTTING THE COUP AGAINST DIEM, MINH KEPT PUTTING OFF THE DECISION AND FINDING NEW EXCUSES FOR NOT ACTING. AT ONE POINT MINH SUGGESTED A SNIPER ASSASSINATION WOULD PERHAPS BE THE BEST WAY TO DEAL WITH DIEM. PM MINH AND TRAN VAN DON AND HE ARGUED THAT WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A REVOLUTION, NOT AN ASASSINATION, AND THAT IF THEY WAITED ANY LONGER, IT WOULD BE THEIR NECKS) FOR NHU WOULD MOVE AGAINST THEM. IN THE END THEY TOOK THE DECISION, NOT GUNS, WHO WENT ALONG.

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4. MINH, HE SAID, IS MOST RELUCTANT TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT. HE IS BEING PUSHED BY THE AN QUANG AND BY SOME PRO-FRENCH EX-GENERALS AND SOME AMBITIOUS POLITICIANS. THEY WILL HAVE THEIR HANDS FULL TRYING TO GET MINH TO MAKE UP HIS MIND. AND WHEN EACH OF THESE GROUPS TELL MINH WHAT THEY WANT IN THE WAY OF OFFICES -- THEY WILL EACH WANT ALL THE OFFICES -- MINH WILL THROW UP HIS HANDS BECAUSE "THE OUTLOOK IS NOT IDEAL." THIEU STILL THINKS MINH WILL NOT MAKE A DECISION UNTIL THE VERY END, AND IF HE DOES RUN IT WILL BE ONLY BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN PUSHED INTO IT BY THE OTHERS.

5. CABINET REORGANIZATION: THIEU SAID HE STILL PLANS A LOW KEY, LIMITED RESHUFFLE, AND HOPES TO MAKE THE ANNOUNCEMENT "MAYBE BEFORE MARCH 1." HE SAID WITH A SMILE THAT HE WILL BE ACCUSED OF MAKING THE CHANGES IN ANTICIPATION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, BUT HIS REAL PURPOSE IS TO HAVE A MORE EFFECTIVE CABINET.

6. HE IS STILL LOOKING FOR A GOOD MAN FOR THE EDUCATION MINISTRY. THE ETHNIC AFFAIRS MINISTRY IS A PROBLEM. NUR IS CORRUPT AND HAS TO BE REPLACED. THE MOST INFLUENTIAL MONTAGNARD IS Y BLING, BUT HE DOES NOT SPEAK VIETNAMESE WELL, SPEAKS LITTLE FRENCH AND NO ENGLISH, AND HAS LITTLE ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE. THIEU'S PRESENT THINKING IS TO APPOINT Y BLING AND PUT UNDER HIM ONE OF THE TWO YOUNG MONTAGNARDS, OR PERHAPS BOTH, WHO HAVE WORKED WITH AMERICANS, HAVE THE LANGUAGES, AND HAVE SOME EXECUTIVE ABILITY. ONE IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE MONTAGNARD TRAINING CENTER IN PLEIKU, THE OTHER IS NOW IN THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATION. HE WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ONE OF THEM MINISTER, BUT THEY HAVE NO SUPPORT AMONG THE TRIBES.

7. VILLAGE DEVELPMENT: THIEU WILL KICK THIS OFF MARCH 1. HE PLANS A COUPLE OF "SEMINARS" A WEEK IN THE REST OF THE MILITARY REGIONS TO SPARK UP THE PROVINCE AND DISTRICT CHIEFS AND LOCAL OFFICIALS.

8. INCIDENTS INVOLVING AMERICANS: I SPOKE ABOUT THE SEVERAL RECENT INCIDENTS IN WHICH VIETNAMESE HAD BEEN ACCIDENTALLY KILLED BY AMERICANS, AND THE CONSEQUENT RISE IN PUBLIC FEELING, ESPECIALLY IN QUI NHON. I SAID WE ALL DEEPLY REGRETTED THESE. GENERAL ABRAMS HAD MADE AND WAS MAKING STRENUOUS EFFORTS

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TO ESTABLISH BETTER CONTROL AND WAS PLANNING TO INVIGORATE THE LOCAL VIETNAMESE-AMERICAN COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEES. ALSO UNDER STUDY WAS THE SHIFT OF AMERICAN FACILITIES TO NEW LOCATIONS AWAY FROM THOSE CITIES WHERE THESE INCIDENTS HAD OCCURRED. THIEU SAID, IN A TONE OF SYMPATHY, THESE INCIDENTS HAPPEN AND THEY CREATE A REAL PROBLEM.
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